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IMPACT OF SOCIAL CLASS.

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IN BRINGING ABOUT EDUCATIONAL CHANGE, EDUCATORS MUST CONSIDER SUCH FACTORS AS MOTIVATION, PARENTAL ATTITUDES, HOME CIRCUMSTANCES, AND JOB INCENTIVES, WHICH IMPORTANTLY INFLUENCE AN INDIVIDUAL'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT. DISCRIMINATION AND CYNICISM IN AN INCREASINGLY AFFLUENT SOCIETY AND WITHIN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM HAVE UNDERMINED THE POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THESE FACTORS AMONG THE DISADVANTAGED. DISADVANTAGED PUPILS MIGHT LEARN MORE EFFECTIVELY IF THE POSITIVE ASPECTS IN THEIR BACKGROUND WERE STRESSED, AND IF THE WIDE GAP BETWEEN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY WERE NARROWED. MULTICULTURAL TEXTBOOKS, INCREASED PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOL AND IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS, AND NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS WHICH FUNCTION AS IMPORTANT COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS ARE AMONG THE MEASURES WHICH MIGHT BE EFFECTED. ALSO, THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN MIGHT ACHIEVE BETTER IN MULTISOCIAL CLASS SETTINGS. FINALLY, JOB AND HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES MUST BE COMMENSURATE WITH AN INDIVIDUAL'S LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT IF EDUCATION IS TO BE RESPECTED BY DISADVANTAGED GROUPS. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN "EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP," VOLUME 25, NUMBER 1, OCTOBER 1967. (AF)

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The task for the school is to bridge the growing gap between the school and the community.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL CLASS

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CLEARLY, the educational process reflects many elements: the native and acquired skills of teachers, the development of new teaching techniques, the advances in textbook and reference materials, and innovative administrative devices and patterns. All of these have contributed to the strides in education. However, while these factors may have facilitated (or even accelerated) student achievement, a series of non-school connected factors may in fact constitute the critical determinants in the educational process. Factors, such as health, home circumstance and study space arrangements, parent attitudes and ambitions, student motivation, ultimate job opportunity and incentive, may largely, or at least far more significantly, affect scholastic levels, than factors conventionally associated with school systems.

Prior to World War II, the national preoccupation with a desire to achieve full-employment tended to obscure individual and social distinctions. There was little public and professional interest in distinguishing among the educational and non-educational ingredients responsible for academic performance. The educational system was confronted with the massive task of schooling large numbers of youth and young adults. In this objective it succeeded in substantial measure, thus contributing significantly to the current American affluence. Lack of achievement was viewed either as evidence of individual deficiency in a class setting where scholastic attainment was the rule, or ignored by many school administrators and teachers in the smug satisfaction they derived from their overall successes, real or presumed.

In retrospect, it is now possible to attribute much of the "leap forward" to those parental, home, and student attitudes, reinforced by the career outlooks, which stimulated the child to avail himself of expanding school opportunities strengthened (but not determined) by advancing educational technique and performance. The critical variables, consequently, did not reside within the educational establishment, but rather outside. The War period, with its labor shortages and job abundance, consti-

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tuted a diversionary era in which youngsters were either in the Army, in school or in the war plants. There was little reason to probe the character of the academic establishment or its practices.

Following the war, phenomenal affluence sharpened the disparity between the "haves" and the "have nots." In addition, public concern grew in the face of the substantial public welfare and related expenditures, accompanied by the restlessness and disaffection among the disadvantaged themselves. These developments drew sharp attention to the role and pattern of education. The appearance of alarming unemployment rates in the 18 to 24 year old age group at a time when substantial numbers of jobs were unfilled, the increasing numbers of school dropouts, and the results of national and local studies which exposed the shameful levels of academic achievement among a substantial segment of the population, all broke down the old complacency.

Society was now confronted with a whole social class of disadvantaged. Worse still, it was all too frequently associated with the lower income Negro resident in the urban centers of our country, adding a racial dimension to the class problem. The dilemma was magnified by the absence of a constructive response with respect to those non-educational factors such as motivation, parental attitude, home circumstance and job and career incentive, as earlier recited. These factors significantly influenced preparation and receptivity for learning in the first instance, and ultimately affected academic achievement. Yet these extra-educational factors have deep roots. They are largely the consequence of discrimination and of societal and educational cynicism, which has set in motion a cycle of inferior education, inadequate institutional, community and personal resources, the sapping of incentive in the face of the lack of commensurate job opportunity and a discouraging chain of circular, generational despair.

Urgent Needs

It is clear that if the chain is to be broken, at least two interdependent elements require immediate attention. First, the educational system needs to be tested against the degree to which it is accommodating the needs of the socially disadvantaged class, drawing on recent research findings and experience. This will likely mean a series of simultaneous measures. There is a growing body of evidence, for example, that the achievement levels of disadvantaged children are appreciably higher in multi-social class educational settings. Text materials adapted to the perception and experience of the group served are also demonstrably more productive than exposure to uniform materials alien to their understanding.

There is interesting and revealing indication, for instance, that the use of marketplace materials is more likely to enhance reading ability than the usual basic primers. Most important, the school system in the disadvantaged areas must be transformed from a detached and externally injected intruder into a community institution.

The neighborhood school concept, which is so fiercely defended in the advantaged areas of the city and suburbs, achieved this citizen support when the school system was both responsive and sensitive to the influences and desires of

affluent parents and citizens generally. It is tragic, however, that in the disadvantaged areas, citizen and parent intervention is generally resented and resisted by school administrators. As a consequence, the neighborhood school in these areas represents little more than a locational designation, not an important community institution.

Second, the means must be found to deal with those non-directly related educational ingredients which provide the climate for learning. Means must be found to join the critical non-academic issues, undermined by decades of deprivation which have destroyed the supports that make education effective. Beyond all else, society must assure that economic and job opportunity will not be foreclosed to the population to be served and that the housing and other institutional resources will be available in commensurate measure with the educational levels achieved. A growing experience tends to indicate that the incorporation into the school system of a breadth of program involvement and response is both workable and productive. This includes the adoption of innovative educational techniques (such as variable class sizes, work and learning experience, and the use of para-professionals) and associated measures developed in the closest relationship with parents, home and community. The task for the school is to bridge the yawning gap between the school and the community.

The school serving the disadvantaged child does *not* need to lower its standards; it does however need to translate these standards into programs and materials meaningful to the child. It should build on the positive elements of the child's background and experience, rather than being directed solely toward remedial action to overcome negative and socially undesirable behavior.

We tend to obscure the demonstrated interest of parents and adults in the disadvantaged community in the education of their children. The parents and concerned adults must be encouraged to join together as a group and be viewed as part of the teaching and administrative staff—not only as "teacher aides" in the classroom, but as "teacher aides" at home. We take the role of parents for granted in middle class areas and accept the educational influences exerted by them as more meaningful than that of even the best teacher. The fact that our ingenuity may be challenged to achieve the same purposes in disadvantaged areas does not in any way diminish the critical importance of the parent-teacher-school relationships.

The limited experience to date with the "community school" in disadvantaged areas demonstrates the feasibility of structuring programs to achieve these purposes. The successes in the Head Start program (the successes almost always being distinguished by the extent of program reach and commitment) put to rest suggestions that disadvantaged youngsters cannot be aided to fulfill their inherent capacity for learning. Much can be accomplished even in relatively brief periods. Added testimony is provided by the increasing number of special academic programs which have not only raised academic levels within the period of student exposure, but have sustained such achievement over the limited post-period available for analysis.

In the United States, we have always resisted classifying and differentiating

our problems and our programs in social class terms. Yet the very practices of society and of our educational system have created the differentiation. If we are to restore our preferred public posture, then the scales demand equalization, and this will only be achieved when the artificially imposed obstacles to learning receptivity are removed. Only then will the American promise of personal fulfillment constitute the great distinction of our society and its educational system.

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